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SUBJECT: NZ NATIONAL DAY UNDERSCORES GOOD RELATIONS WITH MAORI

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. On February 6, New Zealand Prime Minister John Key joined Maori leaders at Waitangi, the site of the signing of the country's founding document, to commemorate New Zealand's National Day. In recent years, this traditional event has been characterized by hostility by Maori activists over perceived historical and contemporary grievances. Although Key himself was the victim of minor outburst at Waitangi, the day was nonetheless widely seen as the most harmonious and cordial Waitangi Day in recent memory. This served to underscore the good relationship that currently exists between the new National-led Government and Maori, largely thanks to Key's positive and inclusive approach toward Maori in the new government. End Summary.

NZ's National Day Means Protests for Some  
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¶2. (SBU) On February 6, Prime Minister John Key, several members of his caucus, opposition politicians and Maori leaders and dignitaries descended on the small seaside township of Waitangi, north of Auckland, to commemorate New Zealand's National Day. Waitangi is the site of the February 6, 1840 signing of New Zealand's founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi, between Maori tribes and the Crown. New Zealand's National Day is commonly known as Waitangi Day.

¶3. (SBU) Rather than a day of celebration, protest is typically the main act at Waitangi, particularly in recent years. Some Maori activists use this day to protest against perceived historical injustices related to the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi or policies of the government perceived as detrimental to Maori interests. Such protests are usually directed at visiting political leaders and have been known to turn confrontational and violent.

PM Key Assaulted on Arrival at Waitangi  
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¶4. (SBU) Prime Minister Key, in his first visit to Waitangi as Prime Minister, was the victim of an isolated act of aggression at the 2009 Waitangi commemorations. When Key alighted from his car on arrival, two Maori objected to his admission to the hallowed Te Tii Waitangi lower marae (Maori meeting place) and managed to breach the security cordon and briefly manhandle Key. The assailants were quickly seized and led away. A 19-year old and a 33-year old were later remanded in custody after they appeared in court on assault charges. Though clearly shaken, Key was unhurt by the attack. The Minister of Maori Affairs and co-leader of the Maori Party, Dr. Pita Sharples, was standing near Key when the attack happened and was knocked to the ground. He too emerged unscathed.

History of Hostility towards Visiting Politicians

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15. (SBU) The attack on Key has historical precedent. Recent attacks on New Zealand politicians attending commemorations at Waitangi have demonstrated how fraught with risk such a visit can be. In 1998, then-opposition Labour Party leader Helen Clark was reduced to tears when her right to speak at the Te Tii Waitangi lower marae was angrily challenged by the well-known Maori activist Titewhai Harawira (Note: Maori protocol prohibits women delivering an address at a marae. End Note.). As a result, Clark chose never to return to the lower marae and instead commemorated the National Day elsewhere in Waitangi. In 2004, then Prime Minister Clark was heckled and jostled as she walked around Waitangi. That same year, the then-National Party leader Dr. Don Brash was pelted with mud by angry Maori activists as he was being interviewed by journalists at Waitangi.

16. (SBU) In contrast, John Key's appearance at Waitangi in 2008, as the new leader of the National Party, was free of incident and he was warmly welcomed by Maori. The good impression made by Key during the 2008 visit set the context for his return to Waitangi a year later as prime minister.

#### PM Assault Roundly Condemned by Maori Leaders

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17. (SBU) Maori leaders, including Titewhai Harawira, immediately condemned the actions of the two men who assaulted Key. They all asserted that the assailants did not represent the views of the majority of Maori. Despite the attack, Key was warmly welcomed at Waitangi by Maori leaders and the public. Key was quick to downplay the attack and affirmed that he was "not going to let a couple of glory seekers go out there and try and put the wrong perception on today." He affirmed that it would not stop him from returning to the lower marae in the future and he would not let it detract from

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improved relations with Maori. Said Key, "New Zealand is moving on, it's changing, and the way forward is through dialogue, an exchange of views and an understanding of each other's positions. It's not from thumping the prime minister when he gets out of the crown car." In a public relations coup, he invited two young Maori admirers to sit with him at the event, which was widely caught by the media cameras.

18. (SBU) The scuffle at the entrance to the lower marae was the only incident to mar what was almost uniformly seen as the most optimistic and festive Waitangi Days is recent memory. Sharples called the 2009 event "one of the best."

#### Key's Unite and Conquer Strategy with Maori

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19. (SBU) Key's governing strategy is central to his Government's good relationship with Maori, which is in stark contrast to his predecessor, Helen Clark. Key's decision to invite into government the Maori Party at the 2008 election was very astute, even though he did not need its votes to form a governing majority. At the 2005 election, Clark stated that in terms of a governing partner option the Maori Party was "the last cab off the rank." At the 2009 Waitangi celebrations, Key praised the Maori Party for realizing it was better to be "part of the solution, not part of the problem" when it went into coalition with National.

110. (SBU) Maori leaders appreciate Key's efforts. Sharples asserted that Maori are today feeling positive, after seeing the relationship between the Maori Party and the government at Waitangi. Notably, even Titewhai Harawira praised the new government's approach to Maori, which has invited Maori to sit at the same table. "I think that's so wonderful," she said.

111. (SBU) Prior to Waitangi Day, Key had approved a request by Maori to fly a Maori flag on Auckland's Harbour Bridge on Waitangi Day. As PM, Helen Clark never engaged on this issue and left the decision to the National Transport Authority, who never assented to the request on the basis that only national flags can be flown on

the Bridge. In Waitangi, Key went further and promised to have a Maori flag flying alongside the national flag from Parliament, Premier House (his official residence in Wellington) and Auckland Harbour Bridge on Waitangi Day in 2010.

Comment: Political Fight for Maori Vote Remains  
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¶12. (SBU) In the midst of proclamations of a renewed spirit at Waitangi and a new era of relations with Maori, politics were never far from the surface. At Waitangi, both Key and new Labour Party Leader Phil Goff disagreed over which party has most to offer Maori.

Both leaders were accompanied by large numbers of their respective parliamentary caucus and used the opportunity to woo Maori voters. Key cited the support deal with the Maori Party and stated that National has more to offer Maori than any other party. Goff, who like Key was also well received at Waitangi, rubbished the claim and asserted that Labour remains a strong friend of Maori. However, Goff has not particularly endeared himself or his party to Maori since becoming Labour's leader following the 2008 election defeat. Maori Party co-leader Tariana Turia called Goff "bloody patronizing" after he claimed that her party would face an electoral backlash for siding with National because most of its supporters gave their party vote to Labour. Turia also noted that "while Labour goes and loudly tells (Maori) everything they do for them, the most empowering opportunities have come from National governments." End Comment.

Keegan